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SUBJECT: GRA ASSERTS UNHRO CLOSURE DOESN'T DIMINISH HUMAN  
RIGHTS COMMITMENT

REF: ANGOLA 248

¶1. (SBU) During a March 31 meeting with Vice Minister of Foreign Relations Jorge Chicoti, Ambassador Mozena expressed disappointment over the GRA's decision to close the Human Rights Office (HRO) in Angola (reftel). The Ambassador said that while the decision to close the office was Angola's to make, the action would be viewed negatively in Washington and other capitals, especially given Angola's commitment last year when campaigning for a UN Human Rights Council seat, that it would deepen cooperation with the UNHRO Angola office.

¶2. (SBU) Chicoti said he would pass our concerns along, adding that the HRO's programs could continue even after the UNHRO closure through the Luanda office United Nations Development Program (UNDP) based in Luanda. He said he hopes the GRA can do even more on human rights through the UNDP than had been accomplished with the HRO. He added that he had not supported closing the office, but "others" (unidentified) in the government pushed this because the UNHRO in Luanda clubbed Angola with countries that were not effectively addressing human rights problems.

¶3. (SBU) According to Chicoti, the GRA had requested that the UNHRO be set up in Luanda to deal with war-related human rights issues. Now, however, following six years of peace, Angola no longer needs special human rights considerations, therefore the GRA decided not to extend the mandate. He said Angola will now be treated as a "normal" country and can continue normal programmatic cooperation on human rights issues through the UNDP. Chicoti assured the Ambassador that diplomatic missions and other stakeholders would have access to the GRA to discuss human rights concerns.

¶4. (SBU) When the Ambassador suggested that 30-45 days was too short a period of time to manage the transition of programs from the HRO to the UNDP, Chicoti agreed and said he would recommend to Foreign Minister Miranda that the HRO be given at least three months to effect its closing.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: If the GRA delivers on extending the time for closing the UNHRO in Luanda and in allowing UNHRO programs to continue, albeit under different auspices, that would take some of the sting out of its decision to deny the UNHRO the mandate needed to remain open. Nonetheless, we and other human rights defenders will remain vigilant to ensure that closure of the UNHRO doesn't presage GRA disengagement from efforts to improve Angola's human rights situation.  
MOZENA